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Finishing and starting fresh



by Susan Beckett
Publisher

There is such release in beginnings and endings. The lure of a fresh canvas unleashes atavistic creative forces that bubble with energy. Standing back to view completed work deepens our satisfaction reservoirs. That mixture provides a fertile growth medium for the next endeavor.

Getting to completion takes a lot of energy. It always seem nearer than it is, and then there is always "just one more thing." It often takes a concerted big push to conquer that last one percent.

Escaping financial collapse follows this pattern. While one can hold on and survive for quite a while, cleaning up the financial mess that accumulates in the process is exhausting and seemingly endless. I wonder if resources are more effective in the long run when spread around to help many hold on with a touch of dignity or concentrated to the great benefit of a smaller number

of indigent people who emerge with no debts and a clean start. Will these people's subsequent self-sufficiency make more resources available to those who got nothing in the previous round of funding so that they, too, can now emerge with a clean slate? Will the effect of these people paying taxes instead of receiving services eventually lead to that last one percent being taken care of? I doubt it, but it may be a more effective, if less humane, model than the one we now use.

Groundcover is launching a matched savings program for our vendors that might shed some light on the questions posed above. A few people who find ways to save regularly will have their savings doubled or tripled to enable them to make a substantive improvement in their lives. In theory, this should result in further savings.

If a person maintains an emergency savings fund of their own, they are less likely to have to take out a short-term loan that comes with high interest rates. If they purchase a cart, they have the means to transport groceries and larger numbers of newspapers to sell. Pay-

ing for a driver's license could open up more employment opportunities and greater income. More will be forthcoming on this in future issues.

In a bit of good news, the State of Michigan is ending the imposition of driver responsibility fees for violations like driving without a license or insurance. Such fees contribute 26.3 million dollars to the state coffers. Unfortunately, this change will not take effect until October 12, 2012.

As reported in earlier issues of Groundcover, these fees further penalized those without the resources to comply with licensing fees to the point where they could never get out from under the fines and fees.

"This legislation addresses unintended consequences of the previous law and helps protect many of our most economically vulnerable Michiganders," said Governor Snyder.

Kudos to the legislature and governor for recognizing the hardship these fees are perpetuating and for taking action to end them.

The legislature also created a fund to replace the eliminated the Low Income and Energy Efficiency Fund that was eliminated earlier this year. The new Vulnerable Household Warmth Fund is expected to provide heating assistance to 95,000 low-income Michigan residents.

The Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners took advantage of unexpected savings from the settlement of lawsuits to restore some of the funding cuts to the coordinated funding for human services made in earlier budget proposals.

It is particularly refreshing these days to have something to be grateful for at the hands of the government.

January is a time for luxuriating in the memories, time, and energy freed up by the conclusion of holiday festivities and end-of-year reconciliations. The lure of the blank slate and endless possibilities calls, unhampered by the plethora of decisions that narrow and define the actual enterprise. This is a time to restore the drive that will power the climb over the next of life's hills. Enjoy!

GROUNDCOVER NEWS MISSION:

Groundcover News exists to create opportunity and a voice for low-income people while taking action to end homelessness and poverty.

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Take action to change our state government

Guest Editorial

Danielle Mack is studying education at WCC and EMU

I had an enjoyable Thanksgiving with my homeless and social work friends at the Vineyard Church Thanksgiving celebration. I really enjoy getting to see friends there that I have not seen in a while. I really enjoyed touching base with my friends from Camp Take Notice, Groundcover News vendors, the church staff from Vineyard Church's Homeless Ministry, and various other like-minded social workers. It was very much like a family reunion. I am glad to see all this work being done to help them. I am also glad to see that my friends all seem to have people that care for them and are helping them with what they can.

Amidst all this fun and joy, I found a very dark cloud beginning to affect my friends. This dark cloud has just begun to affect me with the loss of my food stamps this month. Nearly half of my friends, homeless and low-income alike, have lost their food stamps. Those who used to give so freely and readily to homeless ministries like Vineyard have less to give. Vineyard only had enough food to feed everyone once, with few leftovers for those in need. In past years they have had enough to feed everyone a few times, with leftovers for everyone to take home with them and more leftovers for their other homeless outreaches. I talked to a few of the homeless ministry volunteers and

found out that even the canned goods that they give out at their weekly "Pizza in the Park" homeless outreach have taken a serious hit. The story seems to be the same with other homeless ministries throughout the Ann Arbor area.

Part of these hits come from Governor Rick Snyder who is upping student's tuition, cutting funding to schools, closing schools down, taking food stamps away from people that need them, destroying unions, firing publicly elected officials, etc. Part of these hits come from the Republican Party in the state and federal governments trying to destroy all middle class incomes. Middle class people are losing jobs and having wages cut; teachers are being laid off due to funding cuts. Our county, state, and country are very quickly headed for a fresh new form of Hell. Instead of offering our homeless population a hand up, we are sweeping them under the rug, out of sight and out of mind. Those homeless people who are doing something with their lives by going back to school to get degrees and become contributing members of society again are having their food stolen from them with Governor Snyder taking away their food stamps because they are in school.

I believe it is time for a change. We need to organize our efforts. Our colleges are packed with ticked-off students having to pay more for college, and having their financial aid cut. You want Snyder gone? Network and get

petitions circulating at the start of next semester at all our community colleges, as well as Eastern Michigan University, Michigan State University, and University of Michigan. Get students who are just starting, graduating and currently attending classes to sign these petitions. Go to homeless shelters, register them to vote, and have them sign petitions.

Go to elementary, middle, and high schools during parent teacher conferences to get even more signatures. Go for maximum effect with areas of high concentration of people that want to see him gone. Network so we get all the signatures in the required time limit.

Try occupying Lansing in front of the governor's mansion. If you want to see fewer people who are homeless on the street, then HELP them – increase funding to organizations that help them. We are in a recession; people are losing their jobs, and we need to help them find new jobs and teach them how to survive in this new economy. For those of you uncomfortable with being on the front lines of fighting to help those around you, donate your time to help with serving food at Delonis Center, or Vineyard Church, or some other organization; donate whatever you can to help no matter how small. Even if it is nothing more than a can of food a week or a month, every little bit helps. Give just a few seconds of your time to sign a petition. We can make things better, but not without your help.

Something new and tasty under the sun



by Reverend
Martha Brunell
**Pastor, Bethlehem
United Church of
Christ**

One of the great things about being near a farmer's market is that you never know when you are going to come face-to-face with a unique product, a different way of using familiar materials, a hybrid crop, or a new vendor. There is always something to learn at the farmer's market. It is never the same from one visit to the next.

I had one of those learning moments on a recent trip to the Ann Arbor market. Life had been too hectic, and I hadn't

been there for a while. I took a few minutes to linger, to check to see if vendors were in their usual spots or not, to wonder about people who were missing from the usual crowd, and to inhale the distinct fragrance of holiday greens. All of a sudden, there I was, holding a bottle of hickory syrup. I had never heard of hickory syrup. The hickory syrup guy in the tidy booth was most anxious for me to have a taste. I admit I was a skeptic at first about this hickory syrup.

I grew up in upstate New York and southern Vermont where the countryside is dotted with maple trees and sugar houses. Every spring, for years, my elementary school classes

made our way through the snow in late winter to the small building with a huge, roaring fire underneath a long, open vat. There maple sap was being boiled down into syrup. The sweet, sticky smells from the inside of a sugar house in production are some of the most heavenly smells I know. I am a syrup snob when it comes to pancakes, French toast, and waffles. Don't hand me bottled sugar water with a whiff of artificial maple flavor. I want genuine syrup.

That day at the farmer's market, I couldn't imagine why I needed to add hickory syrup to my condiments. However, the syrup guy was persistent even while a few more hesitant

shoppers gathered in front of him. I tried the syrup; we all did. It was quite good. I bought several bottles for Christmas gifts. And then I asked about how it is made, this Soaring Hill hickory syrup, in Adrian, Michigan. It turns out that hickory tree sap can't be tapped like maple sap. Rather, the core of the process is the boiling of hickory bark.

My gift bottles of hickory syrup sat on the kitchen counter for a while as the holidays approached. When I saw them, I thought about my fondness for maple syrup and my delight at having discovered a fresh version of syrup that is also the real thing. It is always humbling and enriching to know there is

more than one "real thing" in many areas of our lives.

Entering this new year of 2012, perhaps we all will stumble upon a process or a product, an understanding or an undertaking, an opportunity or an organization that is new to our experience. 2012 can be a year of trying out what we haven't known, done, tasted, or considered before. I am not suggesting a long, undoable list of New Year's resolutions. Instead, let's encourage one another to remain open to some newness, big or small, waiting for each of us around the corner.

Here's to a year of fresh "real things!"

Reclaiming your life with voluntary simplicity



by Andrew Nixon
Assistant Editor

Question: *If you could change one thing about your life, what would it be?*

Wait, let me guess. More time? Less chaos?

I don't have to read minds to know that, for many readers, I guessed right. Closely related problems, not enough time and too much chaos seem to be facts of life as unavoidable as death and taxes.

Make no mistake about it – if you routinely feel overwhelmed, undernourished, strained, drained, and distracted – you are not alone. From the overextended adolescent to the bewildered senior and all in between, it seems everyone feels the strain of modern living. For despite all the many achievements and advantages of modern society, never before has living been so downright complicated. There is so much to accomplish and so little time, we are forced to constantly adapt by going faster – pushing the speed limit in all aspects of life. We race frantically through things and between things. We improve our efficiency and we learn to multitask. (I've been known to brush my teeth while driving – that's, like, two whole minutes saved!)

The problem is, the system adapts as we do – greater efficiency quickly gets converted into higher standards of productivity – and so we find ourselves caught in a vicious cycle of doing more and more in less and less time just in

order to survive. We intuit the insanity of this, but don't know exactly what we can do to break the cycle. We long desperately to slow down... but how?

By appreciating that these workaday woes are not just a personal problem but a societal one, we can find compassion for ourselves. It is not we personally who are failing, it is the system. And when we see this, we realize that we have a choice – not necessarily a choice to create a life of perfect ease instantly, but a choice to start experimenting with ways to bring just a little more sanity into our daily life. This experiment in intentional living is often referred to as "voluntary simplicity."

In my own groping toward a lifestyle that nourishes as much as it accomplishes, I have found the following ideas helpful. I hope you find some of them helpful, too.

Six Ways to Cultivate Voluntary Simplicity

Simple Suggestion #1: Start with you. Gandhi said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." There may be a thousand-and-one things about the world you'd like to change. But your own personal life is the only item on that list you always can do something about. So if you are feeling the desire for more spaciousness in your life, resolve in this very moment to do something about it. By finding your own way, you will help show the way for others.

Simple Suggestion #2: Start where you are. Work with your life circumstances as they are now. No matter how busy you are, there is always something you can do, however modest, to create a modicum of peace and well-being in your life. With a little ingenuity, it may be possible to turn a normally stressful activity into a pleasant one. For example, you can ease the tension of the work commute quite a bit simply by putting more space between your vehicle and the one ahead of you. Larger distance means longer reaction time, translating into less braking and a more relaxed mindset (let alone better fuel efficiency and improved traffic safety). Learn to tune in to your simplicity-needs and then get creative and proactive about fulfilling them.

Simple Suggestion #3: Start small. Practicing voluntary simplicity might be worth the effort, but it's not always easy. It involves undoing deeply ingrained habits and going against the grain of our culture. Be realistic and gentle with yourself, starting with low-hanging fruit and one thing at a time, and being easy on yourself when you inevitably stumble. Too much change too quickly can be overwhelming. Gradual adjustments made at the right time and in the spirit of playfulness are more likely to stand the test of time than sweeping reforms made in a moment of exasperation.

Simple Suggestion #4: Downsize. What is truly most important to you in life? Today? At the moment? What in your life genuinely serves these values and meets your needs? What can you do without going without? We all

have needs for pleasure, excitement, entertainment, comfort, even luxury, and fortunately the means available in this culture for satisfying these needs are virtually limitless. The challenge here, of course, is to know when "more is less and less is more," and recognize the difference between "need" and "want." When we cross the fuzzy line from abundance to excess, we needlessly complicate our lives with false obligations and clutter our minds with unessential information. To take an example from my own life, my music collection is so enormous that I haven't even listened to all of it. Maintaining the collection (all, to my everlasting woe, still on CD's) has been a career in itself, and I cannot tell you how many times this hobby of mine has been a source of stress, as when I put on an album because I feel I should, rather than really am in the mood to listen to it. Recently, for the sake of my sanity, I have decided to scale back my music mania a bit. Now I can be occasionally spotted sitting, cooking, or driving with the stereo off. The thoroughways of my mind already feel less crowded; the relative silence is truly golden.

Simple Suggestion #5: Downshift. With less clutter in our life, we can afford to slow down a bit. No longer merely rushing between destinations, we can inhabit our bodies and our senses more fully. We catch up with the backlog of thoughts and feelings that piled up while we were busy running around. We move through the temporary waves of panic and boredom we encounter when we first begin to slow down, realizing that we forgot what true stillness feels like. We

see SIMPLICITY, page 11

The makeshift living arrangements of a person with unsettled housing

by Bill

Writer's note: I am using "makeshift" as temporary living and "unsettled" as not permanent. All too often too many think of homeless as someone who lives in the street and not as someone who does not have a stable place to call home.

My housing situation was stable until 2002-2003, when parents and myself got into arguments about the apartment that I was living in. In fall of 2003, I moved to Ann Arbor. For about three months I lived with my sister, then in my family-owned house until 2004.

In 2004 I moved in to a small room where I had to live in close quarters with others, but during the year I lost my job and I decided to move to Springfield, Missouri. From 2005-2007, I lived in Springfield but I had trouble keeping a stable job and other factors that are connected to bipolar disorder (and other traits of mental illness). It was also my first time that I actually had one-on-one contact on weekly basis with the homeless. I was eating at a food kitchen at least once a week. Before this I was always told to support the homeless but to allow them to "reap their own consequences." (This is based on the idea that you give money, food, etc. to a food bank or homeless shelter to help the "needy" but it is the homeless person's fault.)

In 2007, I made a foolish mistake and followed a crusade of a religious faction into relocating to St. Louis. This group had assured me that I would be well taken care of (by God) if I obeyed (give up all I had and move to St. Louis). I gave all my belongings to the Salvation Army and headed to St. Louis. I found the cult, and was instructed along with the other new recruits to spend the night in the bad part of the city. If we

survived, we would know that we were the chosen ones. If we did not comply, all protections would be removed. I found a homeless shelter where I spent the night instead.

Finding myself going nowhere and having a discharge date ahead of me, I got tired of all the religious mumbo-jumbo. I called my grandma and moved in with her.

During the fall of 2007, I got hired and was making money (working 16-hour days up to seven days a week). But mentally I could not take it. I lost my job and was sent to the hospital. While I was in the hospital, my parents tried to salvage the situation (and save face) by taking me to California. This plan only worked for 30 days, and I was put in to a stockade-style hospital. From the hospital a nonprofit group was trying to "help" me (a false protector). I would have been homeless, but this group stepped in and provided "housing" for me. While I won't go in to details, the FBI and Department of Justice shut the place down and put the owners and staff in prison.

In addition to the problems that I was having at this place, I had a warrant for my arrest in Ann Arbor. (According to the lawyers, as long as I stayed out of Michigan, and away from the FBI, I would be fine.) But I was living in South Central Los Angeles. I got on to a bus and a gang member saw a rival gang member and pulled out a semi-automatic gun and start firing on the bus. Fearing for my life I fled back to Ann Arbor.

From 2008-2010 I was living with my grandma.

In October 2010, I got my own

apartment. I kept it until I lost my job in February, 2011. By May 2011, I was back at my grandma's house.

From May 2011 until October 2011, I was doing fine but then in October she kicked me out.

The first time she kicked me out, she called the police because I was asking too many questions. These questions were in regard to being a tenant. I walked from Eisenhower Parkway in Ann Arbor to Fulton County, Ohio. When I arrived in Fulton County, I was rushed to the Fulton County Health Center, where they determined that I was hypothermic and dehydrated.

My grandma picked me up and took me to the U of M hospital, where I was sent to a third hospital. A week later, I was back at my grandma's house.

The final downfall was when she kicked me out over a piece of toast. I got 8-10 loaves of bread from the food pantry. She bought a "special" loaf of bread for herself and I ate it. She then wanted me to buy her another one. I refused and went to visit a friend.

When I returned, she locked the door and tried to call the police. I turned off the power and water to the house. When the police showed up I was given two choices - go to jail or go to Community Support and Treatment Services (CSTS).

I told them that even if I wanted to go to CSTS they would be closed. The police assured me that my case worker would be there waiting for me. I showed up and sure enough she was. I was

provided with a hotel, where I had to meet with them. Later I found out that it was my grandma who paid for the hotel.

I visited the tent city Camp Take Notice. I returned to my hotel room and packed up, planning to move in to the Delonis Center on Monday at 11 a.m.

On Monday, I showed up at 11 a.m. expecting to walk in and have a bed. After taking care of the pre-screening and wasting an hour, I was told that there were no beds. I was totally upset. I had lunch and then took both of my bags of belongings and my winter coat to my grandma's house and dropped them off.

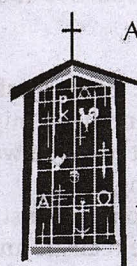
I went to the hospital for a week, and then went back to the Delonis Center, where I got a cot. I was able to move to the third floor and now I have my own bed.

While my "home" for now is at the shelter, I am hoping that someday I can move in to a place where I can stay for some time (10+ years if an apartment and 25+ years if it is an house) and get to call home. Since 2003, I have stayed in 14 different homes but I have yet to find something that I can wake up and say "good morning house" (or apartment), this is my home and not having to worry about losing it, and to come back at night and say "Welcome Home," and know it will be for a while.

Would you like to be a writer or volunteer for Groundcover News?

Please feel free to attend our next meeting at 7 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 12, in the Gallery room at Bethlehem United Church of Christ, 423 S. Fourth Ave., Ann Arbor.

You may also reach us at: contact@groundcovernews.com



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Bills that bind – being imprisoned for failing to do the impossible

by Susan Beckett
Publisher

The December issue told stories of local housing-challenged people mired in debt, much of it the result of compounding fines and penalties incurred for not paying bills and fees. When money is owed to a governmental unit, many such people end up going to jail in lieu of making payments. Some have challenged the ethics and legality of imprisoning people for their inability to pay their debts. This month, we look at local court cases, including one being taken up by the Michigan Supreme Court.

Local attorney Rolf Berg, a recently retired appeals attorney, related two Michigan cases similar to the Gulfport, Mississippi case described last month. A defendant with no available cash was told that if he promised to pay \$3,000 in the next five months, his sentencing would be delayed until then, allowing him to avoid jail. He then returned to Florida where he and his family had been living. He worked as a welder and made regular payments to the court until his back went out a few months later. He returned to Michigan for his trial date. The Michigan judge accepted that going to Florida was a good-faith effort to work and pay, but since he "broke his promise," the plea deal was voided and he was sentenced to prison.

Another client accepted the claim

that his ex-wife became pregnant during a one-night stand after their separation. He paid support for years but stopped when convinced that he had been duped. Later, although that child was then 18, he was arrested for this failure to pay child support. He had been living in Florida where he was supporting a wife and two young children. He returned to Michigan and was ultimately offered a deal of no jail if he paid \$5,000 of the amount owing within six months. But by this time his loss of income had resulted in his family's eviction.

Working two jobs and cutting expenses, even for his depression medication, he was able first to get his family back in a house and had a contract which, when the work was completed, would permit him to pay the \$5,000 on time. But the stress was too much and he got arrested after a drunken argument with his wife. He languished in jail as he could not get a trial date and a guilty plea would violate his Michigan probation. His family again ended up on the street. Finally, he was precipitously brought back to Oakland County, unshaven, and visited in jail by a woman who he thought was from Friend of the Court,



but was actually his attorney. The next day he was sentenced to 3 - 10 years in prison despite his good faith efforts to comply, and the family he was diligently supporting.

Again the explanation was that he had failed to keep his promise to pay. The Michigan Supreme Court is reviewing several cases that challenge the right of the state to criminalize poverty. At issue is whether the failure to pay child support is a criminal act regardless of the parent's ability to pay.

One case recently profiled on Michigan Radio is *People vs. Likine*. Selesa Likine was ordered to make child support payments of \$1,131 per month for her three children based on her income as a real estate agent. In 2005 she was hospitalized and suffered a schizophrenic break. She paid little or no child support in the following years while she subsisted on disability payments. In 2008, she was charged with failing to pay child support, a criminal felony. At her trial, she was not allowed to introduce any evidence of her inability to make those payments and she was convicted, making her a felon and virtually guaranteeing she will never work as a realtor again.

Under current law, if a person is ordered by family court to pay child

support and goes into a coma the next day, the person is criminally liable for failure to pay, even though they were incapacitated and unable to comply with the court order or petition for a reduction in support payment, and the failure to do so was involuntary.

An association of Michigan Criminal Law Professors evaluated this case and concluded that the courts erred when they failed to allow testimony regarding the defendant's ability to pay. They asserted that it was a violation of both the Michigan and the United States constitutions to punish individuals for failing to perform acts impossible for them to perform. If the Michigan Supreme Court upholds the lower court's decision, it would make Michigan the only state in the nation to reject the fundamental tenet that people are only criminally responsible for voluntary acts.

Michigan is currently the only state which has no defense for persons unable to make ordered child support payments. No decision has been reached, but in the recent oral arguments in the Supreme Court one Justice admitted that the loss of a job may make one unable to pay, but suggested that the person could have saved up for such a possibility. It also appeared that the majority may recognize such a defense, but limit it to cases of absolute impossibility.

Winter tragedies could be avoided with a warming center for homeless

Guest Column by Orian Zakai

Orian Zakai is a PhD student at the department of Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan, an author of fiction in Hebrew, and a member of Occupy Ann Arbor.

Winter is here. Deadly low temperatures will torture hundreds of Washtenaw County inhabitants who will not be able to find shelter. The Delonis Center has diminished the capacity of its warming spaces this year, from 75 to 25. Even with additional 75 spaces at the Delonis residential program and the 25 spaces at the rotating church shelter, this is not enough. We know for a fact that dozens of people were sleeping outside, under bridges, on sidewalks, on the footsteps of churches, gas stations, etc., in previous winters. The recent foreclosures, layoffs and pension cuts mean that more people are looking for shelter rather than fewer.

In addition, Ann Arbor has been lacking a daytime warming center for a

while now, and thus, numerous people must wander around town during the cold days in search of warmth at the public library, university buildings, local businesses and the like.

"This winter's record low temperatures will not only be unbearable and cruel to some, but will also be very painful and even fatal to others. In a civil society like our own, most of us would agree that it would be equally as cold and just as cruel if we chose to ignore the dilemma some of our citizens face this Christmas and New Year holiday season," stated David Coleman, one of the founding members of the "Imagine Warming Centers" group, in the last city council meeting.

"Imagine Warming Centers," a task force consisting of students and community members, envisions a 24-hour warming center democratically run by homed and homeless volunteers. This would be a place of community building, where homeless and homed individuals combine their skills, explore

their creativity, support and empower each other. Over 25 volunteers are committed to work at the warming center this winter, and more and more people are constantly asking to get involved.

The biggest concern right now is locating a site that could be ready and available to the public as soon as possible. The group has been looking at vacant commercial spaces and buildings due for demolition, and has asked for the city's support in locating a space that could be leased or donated to the warming center.

"We approached a few property owners and they have not been cooperative with us," said activist Alexandra Hoffman in her address to the City Council.

"The winter is here, the volunteers are waiting, and we need a space! My friend mentioned 415 Washington Street; there is also the Georgetown Mall and the former Borders. These spaces can be

used while the redevelopment projects are being pursued. We could use these spaces right now," she added.

So far, however, the City of Ann Arbor has been slow in offering assistance or even advice. The group has also sought professional help from the Washtenaw Housing Alliance, but the position of WHA is that resources should be invested in establishing affordable housing, rather than a temporary shelter. Members of the Imagine Warming Centers group agree that housing is the ultimate goal, but contend that the current need for a public warm space should still be met in the short term.

"While we certainly intend to work toward the building of affordable housing in Ann Arbor," said one member of the group, "we also need to let people in out of the cold right now, so that we do not look back in anger and sorrow come April and know that we could have prevented people's deaths, and didn't."

Camp Take Notice is a self-governing democracy



by C. Lee Alexander
Assistant Editor

Michigan winters are brutal. Now imagine hunkering down and riding out the season in a tent. The economic slump means tent cities are springing up all across America. Ann Arbor is home to a community known as Camp Take Notice (CTN). This past summer the population of the camp surged above 60 and the diehards among them will now spend another winter with few or none of the comforts most take for granted.

One astonishing aspect of CTN is how politically self-governing and democratically structured it is. A separate nonprofit organization, MISSION, was formed and organized to help support the camp. Dr. Brian Nord is MISSION's president. He said that when he first heard about the idea for a politically organized homeless community, he thought the idea was, frankly, crazy.

"It's not crazy though," Nord said, "it makes a lot of sense. It makes sense because it's people working internally for their own community. Becoming a community is the only way this can work."

"Our principle challenge is public knowledge and understanding," Nord said. "There is a pervasive opinion about impoverished and homeless people and changing minds about the facts is very difficult. A lot of what drives people is confirmation bias. People tend to gravitate toward ideas that reinforce their beliefs, even in the face of other facts."

Caleb Poirier is an activist who helped found CTN, modeled on a similar homeless enclave in Seattle where he stayed for a short time. CTN has been forced to move three times already. The camp is currently located off Wagner Road, between Jackson and Dexter Roads.

Poirier was twice jailed for resisting the removals, something he'd never experienced.

"When they released me the first time," he said, "they told me, 'we're going to let you go, but before we let you go we have to ask, are you going to do this again?' I answered, 'Yes.' In exasperation my jailer sent me back to my cell and said, 'We can't let you go if you're going to go back there.' So I said, 'Okay,' but an hour later they let me go anyway."

The word 'community' is used heavily by everybody involved with the CTN project. Harsh challenges and

difficulties often create the strongest bonds. Poirier said common hardships work toward drawing people together. "I believe the sort of cooperation that's required to survive," he said, "is a very integral piece of what causes people to form communal relationships. It's the act of surviving together in an austere environment and the act of engaging in activities of daily living that creates connections."

"I'm very interested in the camp becoming an increasingly socially healthy community," Poirier said.

"I have plenty of personal opinions about what I'd like it to turn into, but what overrides that is my hope that the campers themselves will put forth their opinions and make the camp their own. I think community happens when a new person shows up at camp and other campers are able to help that person set up their tent and give them sleeping bags and blankets."

The political structure of CTN revolves around its executive committee. The group is made up of five campers elected by residents. Enforcing camp rules is the committee's main responsibility. CTN has a strict policy against drugs and alcohol and violators are generally evicted, although violations can later be appealed. Brian Durrance is MISSION's vice-president. He said that nearly all evictions at camp are a result of substance abuse and it is always heartbreaking putting somebody back out on the street. He said the hard truth, though, is that the only way to make any society function properly is to maintain clear standards.

"Just say that one night you got into a fight and the executive committee decides to evict you," Durrance said.

"You would be out immediately, but on Sunday you could come back and appeal that decision before the larger body. That's the purpose of the body; it's a check and balance, so that we don't get tyrannical people on the executive committee making arbitrary decisions."

Before residents are permitted to enter camp they're all given a set of rules they're expected to adhere to. Clearly outlining expectations removes ambiguity.

"You must understand that you don't have a right to be here unless you agree to participate in our community and follow our contract," Durrance said. "There are lots of places you can go. If you're homeless you can go anywhere, right? You don't need to be here at CTN."

MISSION maintains a steady stream of goods that fuels the camp's material needs. Churches and individuals donate tents, sleeping bags, propane, bus tokens and most of the other day-to-day needs of campers. Durrance says that cooperation is the price residents pay for the benefits that MISSION works hard providing. Even the seemingly mundane act of arranging transport to doctors or other appointments requires careful planning.

"If you don't feel like you can participate," Durrance said, "if you feel like you don't have any obligation to our community, then our community feels it has an obligation to evict you. We don't believe everyone just has a right to be wherever they want to be. We believe if you're here, you're here to be a part of our group."



Caleb Poirier is an activist who helped found CTN

Being part of a group means participating in decision-making. Weekly meetings are held Sundays, where important topics are discussed and votes are held. Sunday is also a day for campers to host a potluck meal with a standing invitation to the wider Ann Arbor community.

see CAMP, page 11



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Vendors, once housing insecure — where are they now?

by **Francesca Lupia**
Groundcover Contributor

Groundcover's vendors are unfailingly grateful for the generosity of the community and for Groundcover's impact in their lives. They strive to use their connection to the organization to increase their individual capacities for good. I had the opportunity to speak with four Groundcover vendors this month. Each of these remarkable individuals shared thoughtful and poignant reflections on their personal experience with Groundcover.



Miriam
Miriam discovered Groundcover when founders Susan Beckett and Laurie Lounsbury came to the Delonis Center (in which she was living at that time).

She remembers, "They asked us if we were interested in helping ourselves. I signed up, and I knew I was staying."

Miriam is proud to be Groundcover's "Vendor #6," one of the original vendors of the street newspaper. She has also been featured in an article about her personal background. When asked why she has remained at Groundcover for such a long time, Miriam eagerly expounded on the benefits Groundcover offers to the Ann Arbor community.

"A lot of people don't understand what being homeless is about," she explained. "They don't know that it can happen to anyone. Groundcover gives them an insight into homelessness."

Miriam's long career with Groundcover has also been enriched with deep personal connections.

"The best part is helping people. There's definitely love in it. I'm a religious person, and I see love and faith in this paper's work."

Since joining Groundcover, Miriam has successfully found housing. However, her life has not been without challenges: physical ailments have made her situation "very hard" at times. Miriam suffers from epilepsy, and has struggled to find seizure-control medicine that does not physically weaken her. However, the generosity of her Groundcover and church communities have supported her and given her strength to push through physical hardships.

"Selling papers keeps my spirits up," she said. "It gives you pride and dignity, and an opportunity to be a human being. You get to stand tall. It's a good feeling, to have self-respect." Her work at Groundcover has also helped her supplement her personal budget, which includes rent and utilities for her apartment, money for her adult son, and personal needs.

In the months to come, Miriam wishes to help Groundcover grow, and to "give back" to the organization that has helped her find respect and housing. "We work together," she declared. "It's good for the soul."

Rissa (in upper right photo)
Rissa is primarily a vendor, but she has also written several articles for Groundcover. She also introduced Groundcover to Shelley (profiled later in this article), who would go on to become her fellow vendor.

"I enjoy meeting people, and I like to talk," she explained. Indeed, Rissa's sociability and passion for Groundcover has both brought new members to the Groundcover community and allowed her to drastically improve her own situation.

Of her introduction to Groundcover, Rissa remembers: "I first found out about Groundcover when Susan (Beckett) and Laurie (Lounsbury) came to the Delonis Center [where Rissa was living at the time]. They

explained the paper's mission, and I thought it was a great idea. So I said, 'Sign me up!'" She now sells papers outside of the Peoples' Food Co-op on Fourth Avenue.

Her favorite aspect of working for Groundcover is, not surprisingly, meeting new people, but she also appreciates "the chance to earn income — a hand up, not a handout... the support I've gotten from Groundcover is a great thing."

The aforementioned financial and social support has since allowed her to find stable housing and deal with physical challenges. Though she still sometimes struggles to make ends meet, Rissa proudly deems herself an "incurable optimist. I'll find a way to get it done with Groundcover."

But Groundcover's impact on Rissa's life has been far from purely personal. It's given her an



Rissa selling Groundcover newspapers in Kerrytown

opportunity to be "influential to others. It's a great spiritual encouragement," she explained. Rissa is an aspiring computer teacher, and she has used her passion for education to teach other vendors about various software and computer programs. "I love that 'Oh! Now I get it' moment when I'm teaching others," she shared.

see VENDORS, page 10

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Fill in the squares so that each row, column, and 3-by-3 box contain the numbers 1 through 9.

Cryptoquote

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GUHTGEDP BESIDAT"

— EJAIB FUGOT

Solutions on page 11

GROUNDCOVER VENDOR CODE

While Groundcover News is a nonprofit organization and newspaper vendors are considered contracted self-employers, we still have expectations of how vendors should conduct themselves while selling and representing the paper.

The following list is our Vendor Code of Conduct, which every vendor reads and signs before receiving a badge and papers. We request that if you discover a vendor violating any tenets of the Code, please contact us and provide as many details as possible. Our paper and our vendors should be positively impacting our County.

All vendors must agree to the following code of conduct:

- Groundcover News will be distributed for a voluntary donation of \$1. I agree not to ask for more than a dollar or solicit donations by any other means.
- I will only sell current issues of Groundcover News.
- I agree not to sell additional goods or products when selling the paper or to panhandle, including panhandling with only one paper.
- I will wear and display my badge when selling papers.
- I will only purchase the paper from Groundcover News Staff and will

not sell to or buy papers from other Groundcover News vendors, especially vendors who have been suspended or terminated.

- I agree to treat all customers, staff, other vendors respectfully. I will not "hard sell," threaten, harass or pressure customers, staff, or other vendors verbally or physically.
- I will not sell Groundcover News under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- I understand that I am not a legal employee of Groundcover News but a contracted worker responsible for my own well-being and income.
- I understand that my badge is property of Groundcover News and will not deface it. I will present my badge when purchasing the papers.
- I agree to stay off private property when selling Groundcover News.
- I understand to refrain from selling on public buses, federal property or stores unless there is permission from the owner.
- I agree to stay at least one block away from another vendor. I will also abide by the Vendor corner policy.

If you see any Groundcover News vendors not abiding by the code of conduct, please report the activity to:
contact@groundcovernews.com
734-972-0926

ACROSS

- Polish cake
- Old Testament poem
- Actor Rodriguez
- Poe character, Roderick _____
- Dutch electronics company
- Hockey player Bobby
- She performed at an Ontario resort before making it big in Nashville
- Actress Green
- 2008 movie, _____ Pounds
- Examination by an outsider
- Pig
- "_____ the season"
- Cracker
- Bed covers
- Insignia
- Lichen
- Lace coaster
- Combine
- 2005 movie, _____ Flux
- Make a comeback
- Shrek
- Online legal information (abbr.)
- Depressing
- Set out
- Entertains
- Mythological avengers
- Elves
- _____down strike
- "_____ to Joy"
- Steadfast
- Of the elbow
- Assist
- He learned five languages and studied literature before becoming a chemist
- Compass point (abbr.)
- Blockade
- Watch manufacturer
- Possessive pronoun
- Belief
- Toy bricks

DOWN

- Vehicle
- Fire residue
- Food preservative (abbr.)
- Griffey's of Major League Baseball
- Short operatic composition
- Seeger and Townshend
- Planted

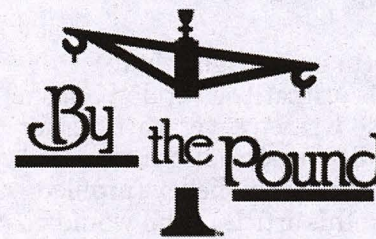
Famous People's Beginnings

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63				64					65			

- Tennis player Ivanovic
- Super Bowl number, in 2018
- William Rand's partner
- He resisted persuasion to become a fisherman like his father
- Southern California city
- Angry
- Car rental company
- Indian tribe
- Team
- _____ Falls, Montana
- She grew up in a California commune
- Facial expression
- With skill
- NFL quarterback Dawson
- Poker pro Wendee
- Challenges
- Seeger and Townshend
- Tightly packed

- Ascended
- "_____ the fields we go"
- Survive
- Fuel
- Soccer player Hamm
- Locate
- Cut
- Aplomb
- Cold rain
- Exhort
- European city
- Recline
- Marsh
- Entreat
- Self
- _____ Vegas

Puzzle by Jeff Richmond



Bulk & Gourmet Foods

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- Flour
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- Pasta
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- Candy
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Book Review: Idiot America: How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free

by Charles P Pierce

c. 2009, published by Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc, New York

by David KE Dodge
Groundcover Contributor

People considering reading *Idiot America* should take warning: its author lures with irresistible humor, until the reader is snared into reading sobering, even alarming descriptions of the decayed state of political discourse concerning critically important public policy issues; or, even worse, concerning trivial, ersatz issues which have displaced important issues as topics of public discussion.

Pierce starts with an introduction that familiarizes his readers with The Creation Museum, in Hebron, Kentucky, a Genesis-based depiction of the origins of all life on earth, both past and present. The "Christian theme park" and its exhibits are recalled at numerous points in his narrative.

Mr. Pierce goes on to expose his readers to the three Great Premises of *Idiot America*:

Any theory is valid if it sells books, soaks up ratings, or otherwise moves units;

Anything can be true if someone says it loudly enough;

Fact is that which enough people believe. Truth is determined by how fervently they believe it.

The decay of public discourse is marked by an indifference to truth; by a distrust of expertise; by a choosing of, and polarization of, "sides," and by activism misguided to the point of calumny and violence.

In his research for writing *Idiot America*, Pierce interviews people who have been

directly and adversely impacted by public policy developed under the influence of demagogues and media wags. Pierce's contacts included hospice staff and volunteers in Florida, and the members of families of students at a nearby elementary school; a Federal District Court Judge in Williamsport, Pennsylvania; an American Indian community on a far-flung shore on the Chukchi Sea, in Alaska; a terrorism expert in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and a number of ignored patriots in the D.C.

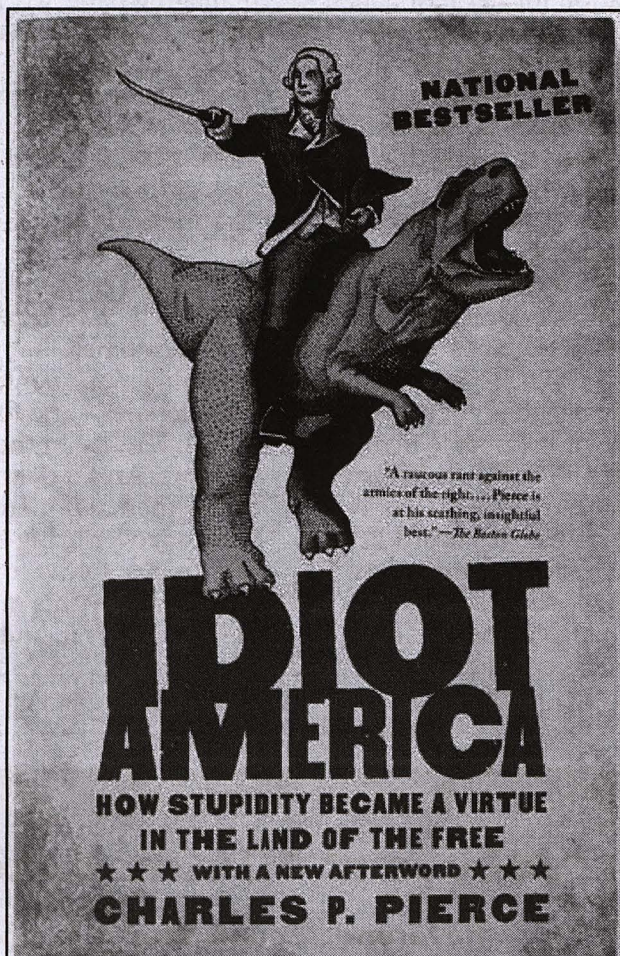
metropolitan area who put vital national interest above partisan political maneuvers and, in some cases, even above personal career interests.

Pierce shows how the Great Premises of *Idiot America* apply to curious positions adopted on a number of different issues, including creationism in public schools, hospice care, global warming, torture, habeas corpus, the FCC and the fairness doctrine, government as an enemy, and

how to best counter terrorism.

The more exotic positions taken concerning such controversial (or, in some cases, widely settled) issues may seem to many Americans to be mere curios, things to be ignored when conditions permit, and humored when they force our attention. But when public debate on such issues becomes mired in irrational diatribe and posturing on the part of a small segment of the public, the costs to "innocent," disinterested parties can be great: taxes diverted from education to litigation; a neighborhood elementary school temporarily closed due to anonymous threats of violence; a small, close-knit community eroding into the sea after centuries of existence; bodies shipped home in coffins as a result of gratuitous war-making.

Idiot America is worth reading. Ann Arbor District Library carries at least three copies.



Even When

by La Shawn Courtwright
Groundcover Vendor

Dedicated to my Grandmother Sylvania who never threw her Christmas tree out until the twelve days of Christmas were over.

Even when you've given your Love to those who
taste it, touch it, live it, do it, act-out-of-it, -in -Love,
All you give is Love.

Even when that something, someone, somehow wills
you to derail,
off your own tracks,

Even when life just happens,
Let no-thing or any-thing,
Take the Love,
You Own!

Even when they just won't accept you.
You just go on and Love,
Love to forgive
Forgive,
To Love!

Christmas to me means,
the beginning,
to pursue by acts
of good will
for all!



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6:00 - 7:30 pm

Public welcome ~ tickets \$10/adult and \$4/children under 10

January 27 ~ Parking Lot Pretzels ~ Noon

January 29 ~ Organ Recital ~ 4:00 pm
Bethlehem Organist Gail Jennings Performing

an invitation to grow in spirit and serve with joy

Vendors embrace new challenges, reach out to others

continued from page 7

In addition, Rissa had an opportunity to join other Groundcover vendors and staff members at the annual North American Street Newspaper Association conference. Rissa was reminded of the true potential of street newspapers to "give a voice to the voiceless." She met vendors from across the country, and hopes to use the perspectives gathered there to help Groundcover grow. "I'm so grateful for Groundcover," Rissa stated. "It teaches you that things work out eventually, and how to appreciate people."



Tony

If you've purchased a copy of Groundcover News within the last several months, you may have noticed a simple inscription penned across the top of the front page: "Pray for Mariel, 8 years old." This powerful message is the work of Tony, a 16-month Groundcover vendor. As he sold papers on the corner of Liberty and Main, Tony met eight-year-old Mariel Almendras as she tied ribbons around lampposts in Ann Arbor to promote cancer awareness. Mariel has since passed away from a rare form of childhood cancer (Tony attended and spoke at her funeral), but the bright and determined little girl has served as an inspiration to Tony as he continues work for Groundcover.

"That little girl did more good in her life than a 100-year-old man," he reflected. "She's with me on my corner every day."

Mariel's message is just one of the many stories that, for Tony, are the highlight of his work with Groundcover. "You meet so many people. It makes you a better person," he explained. He discovered

Groundcover when Susan Beckett came to a free breakfast at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church and gave a presentation about the street newspaper and its mission. He was homeless and unemployed at the time, having lost his construction job, and decided to try selling newspapers. Tony soon realized the immense uplift that his new career provided.

"You get to enjoy every smile," he added. "There are a lot of people with good hearts out there, and it really makes you feel good."

Tony cites his eight-year-old granddaughter Brittney as his main inspiration for work and life. They communicate via text message, but have not been able to visit frequently since Tony lost his job. He said that "the hardest part [of being homeless] was not seeing her," but using the money earned from his work at Groundcover, Tony has since found housing. He also plans to write a comic/cartoon for Groundcover, inspired by Brittney and titled "Brittney and G.P." Flip to the front page of this copy of Groundcover News. Has Tony penned a mini-memorial for Mariel across the top? Even if he hasn't, his compassion and devotion to the community are embodied in each issue of Groundcover.



Shelley

Shelley, a vendor and contributing writer, has a clear talent for business.

"I love coming up with new ideas," she enthused. "Last summer, I wanted to get some more exposure for Groundcover. So I went to the dollar store and bought a hat with a flamingo on it. I brought some bubbles and plastic leis to my corner, and business picked up."

In the long term, Shelley wishes to return to college and earn a degree in Business Management (she took classes in Communications and English at Washtenaw Community College last winter), and eventually open a roller rink in Ann Arbor. In August, 2010, Shelley became unemployed: an event that put her housing situation "on the edge" and challenged her business aspirations. While waiting for food at a local food bank, she met Rissa who told her about Groundcover's work in the community. Shelley couldn't afford to make a one-dollar donation for her first paper, so Rissa gave her one free. After her Groundcover orientation, she got the customary 10 free papers allotted to each vendor to start their career and "the next thing you know, I was a vendor!"

"It started out as being for the money," she says, but Shelley's career with Groundcover quickly became something much more valuable.

"My favorite part has got to be the camaraderie of the people involved," she remarked. "People really listen to what I have to say." She has also made her perspectives heard in several articles for Groundcover. Her first article focused on the differences between panhandlers and Groundcover vendors – a distinction that, in Shelley's opinion, is sometimes unclear to the

general public. "It's important to differentiate," she noted. In the near future, she plans to write an article about teen homelessness.

Shelley's son, a high school student, is the youngest Groundcover vendor. He sometimes experiences stigma for his work: "It's associated with homeless people," Shelley explained. "He gets frustrated sometimes, because it's not a steady job where you get a paycheck: and in some sense, he's right." In the future, as Groundcover expands, Shelley hopes to work in the office, managing paperwork and other business-related needs. But for now, she is grateful for the "compassion, tolerance, and patience" that Groundcover has taught her. She adds, "I'd just like to say thank you to everyone who has supported Groundcover and myself."

Groundcover's very mission is one of self-reflection and growth. It strives to help our community re-evaluate our perceptions of homelessness, and to make a true difference in the lives of its vendors. And it definitely succeeds: the women and men who sell Groundcover bring both reflection and change to the front page each month. Enjoy this month's edition of Groundcover, and let the stories of these vendors inspire you as you enter a new year full of potential for good.



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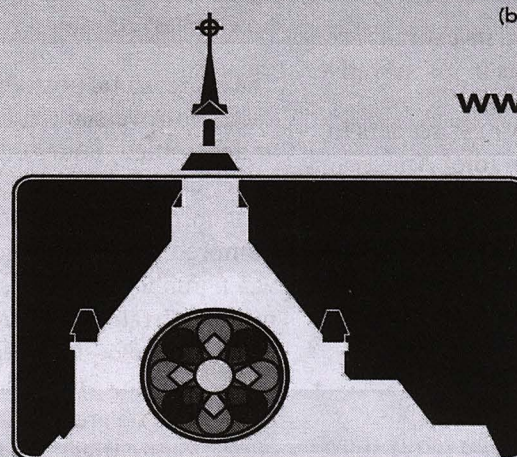
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Camp gives opportunity for homeless and middle class people to understand one another

continued from page 6

Peggy Lynch is a MISSION board member. She invests substantial blocks of time reaching out on behalf of CTN.

"Not only is there this exceptional wonderful community-building going on within the camp," Lynch said, "but within our very economically stratified society, this gives people in the middle class the ability to develop friendships with homeless people. We

are a community within the camp with community ties outside the camp."

Educating people about homelessness is important. Sunday potlucks work at breaking down stereotypes. Lynch said it's a rare opportunity for people who have few chances to cross social barriers.

"Sitting in at these Sunday meetings," Lynch said, "one thing that just knocks

me over every single time is how amazing these camp meetings are. These are people who are often at the very lowest point in their lives, who have so many issues to deal with.

"It takes a special set of terrible circumstances for a person to end up homeless. Each person, individually, is just struggling with a terrible burden, but when they get together they make group decisions.

"The decisions they make collectively are just amazingly wise and well-considered. It's really given me a much more positive view of the democratic process. The concept of homeless people self-governing sounds sort of absurd, but to have watched it over and over again, this collective decision-making process results in amazingly good, compassionate, wise decisions."

Simplifying your life is the "ultimate sophistication"

continued from page 3

begin to find enjoyment again in simple things: The sweetness of breath, the changing of the seasons, and the sheer wonder of being alive. What's more, when we slow down, time itself seems to follow suit; it no longer feels quite so much like a scarce commodity. Less again finds a way of becoming more.

Simple Suggestion #6: Learn to say "enough." Just about everything in our mass culture is designed to catch our attention and feed and multiply our desires. For instance, the average American is subjected

to 3,000 advertisements a day. We are goaded to constantly consume, and to "upgrade" our belongings, our image, our vocabulary, and our entertainment preferences to the latest fad. A lot of these novelties are really clever, fun, and exciting – no wonder our fascination. However, if we accept without discrimination all of these messages we receive, we will eventually become (as my favorite philosopher Alan Watts might have put it) mere tubes through which corporations and politicians push their products – in one end and out the other, so to speak. But human beings are so much more than consumers; we are not here to merely "shop till we drop."

To keep these forces from taking over our lives, we need to continually reassert our human dignity, and take a personal stand for the things we cherish most. We can take that stand by voicing our concerns, or by simply making different choices: Turning off the television; shutting down the computer; going without plans for the evening; taking an aimless stroll; watching the clouds pass by... The possibilities are infinite, and the more we unwind and unfold into the beautiful richness of the uncomplicated present moment, the more fully we realize – as Leonardo da Vinci once put it – that "simplicity is the ultimate sophistication."

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Strange (but Mostly True) Stories About a Mother and her Daughter • Cy Klone © 2012



CRYPTOQUOTE

Solution

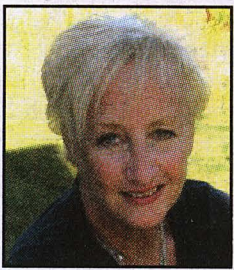
"To love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance."

— Oscar Wilde

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L	O	Y	A	L				U	L	N	A	R		
A	I	D		A	L	F	R	E	D	N	O	B	E	L
S	S	E		S	I	E	G	E		O	M	E	G	A
H	E	R		T	E	N	E	T		L	E	G	O	S

7	8	1	5	4	6	3	9	2
2	3	4	8	1	9	6	7	5
6	9	5	2	7	3	4	8	1
8	5	2	4	9	1	7	6	3
3	4	9	6	5	7	1	2	8
1	6	7	3	8	2	9	5	4
9	7	3	1	2	8	5	4	6
5	1	8	9	6	4	2	3	7
4	2	6	7	3	5	8	1	9

If the cat and dog can do it, then so can I – but maybe I shouldn't



by Laurie
Lounsbury
Editor

Not again.

Not this year.

I am not making a bunch of unachievable New Year's resolutions that leave me in a quagmire of consternation when I realize I'm not going to be able to keep them.

I will not resolve to lose 20 pounds in two months.

I will not resolve to become a vegetarian – especially not a vegan.

I will not resolve to give up ALL four of my favorite wintertime food groups – Sweet, Salt, Fat and 86 Proof. Maybe one or two, but not all four. Life isn't worth living without at least some of that stuff.

This year, I'm basing my resolutions

on lessons I've learned from my housemates – a cat and a dog.

So here goes:

From the Honduran kitty, I resolve to stretch every time I wake up. But I will not claw at the carpet even though I'm somewhat attracted to the concept of multi-tasking and wearing down the rough edges on my nails while stretching.

From my dog, I resolve to wake up eager and ready for a walk in the park. But, unlike my dog, I resolve not to sniff other dogs or people in inappropriate places. Maybe dogs can make new friends this way, but it's never worked too well for me.

When I'm hungry and need help getting a meal on the table, I resolve to ask for help and not passively-aggressively bat my food dish around the kitchen like it's a mouse in advanced stages of rigor mortis and then knock it down the basement stairs.

If I need a hug and affection, I will reach out openly and honestly to those who can fulfill those needs – I will not resort to biting their toes to get a backrub.

I will not lick myself in front of guests.

If I need to assert my authority in a houseful of rowdy company, I will not hump the loudest person's leg.

I have also been inspired by some human companions, which has prompted me to add their philosophies to my resolution list:

From Margie, I resolve not to get discouraged when the world situation seems so hopelessly overwhelming and tragic. I will remember the *Butterfly Effect* and know that even if I do one small thing to make a difference in the world each day, the effects of those small acts can stir up a mighty wind of change, just like the flutter of butterfly wings on one side of the planet can create a hurricane on the other side.

From Jerry, I resolve to slow down and take a closer look at nature's beauty. When we look closely enough, we can see ourselves reflected in the most amazing ways, from ice formations on a river to sand etchings on a beach after the waves recede.

From Mary, I resolve to never forget that just about anything is achievable if a friend has your back.

From my First Friday friends, I resolve to sing and dance and play the guitar more often, because even the worst case of the blues (emotional, not musical) can be expunged with those activities.

I wish all of you good luck with your New Year's resolutions. And if you find you've bitten off more than you can chew, then make a new resolution – to try and make life a little better for someone less fortunate, even if it's a small gesture.

Believe me, it will count.

The January Music Scene

by Jerry Mack
Groundcover Contributor

Our world is rich in human-made and naturally occurring musical sounds. It is a vibration that allows most of us to experience and participate in its expression and energy. For the month of January, here's where you can go to appreciate great sounds.

Guy Hollerin's Local Blues & Brews at the Holiday Inn near U-M's campus on Plymouth Rd. has all the great danceable rhythm & blues you'll need to lighten up Saturday nights. The first two Saturdays are booked with big-time musicians, with back-to-back ladies singing the blues for you.

Lady Sunshine & the X Band welcome you to the new year's first Saturday night with soulful hip-shakin' blues, and funk on Jan. 7. Lady Sunshine and her 7-piece groove machine have been hard at work for almost 20 years providing some of the best R&B, soul, funk, and blues with a impassioned delivery that always lets the good times roll. Original X Band members "Slick" Rick Humesky on guitar and

Pat Padila on tenor saxophone with her poignant repertoire of originals, blues, and soul renditions.

Thornetta Davis is one of the most popular blues singers in the Detroit area. She and her band will rock your troubles away with big time blues and soul from the Motor City on Jan. 14.

Harper & His Midwest Kind stop back on the Jan. 21. The Australian-born songwriter hones his original music from the fusion American R&B, roots blues and world music. His shows are always a unique performance, which include solos on the harmonica and the aboriginal didgeridoo.

Boogie down with some fine jump blues and classic rockers with **The Bluescasters** on Jan. 28.

The Friday Happy Hour from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Live at PJ's has become the regular stop for those who want to jump start

their weekend with some great local bands. **Fubar** plays a danceable mix of soul and rock originals and covers Jan. 6. **The Terraplanes** rocks the house

with blues and roots rock on Jan. 20. Long time Happy Hour hosts, **Drivin' Sideways** plays roots country, swing and pop covers on Jan. 13 and 27.

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